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ABSTRACT

This report describes key planning strategies of the five higher education sectors in Nebraska. The five sectors include independent colleges, private career schools, state colleges, the University of Nebraska system, and technical community colleges. Fourteen general strategies which are of importance across sectors are briefly summarized in separate sections. The strategies focus on the areas of student enrollment, faculty employment, general education, skills for employment, off-campus delivery, advanced degrees, research programs, support services and facilities, libraries, public image, economic and community development, student financial aid, funding from public, and governance structure. A final section describes the strategic planning process for higher education from the perspective of state government. (JDD)

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From the Institutions' Perspective: Strategies in Higher Education

In addition to its concern for educational planning from a statewide perspective, the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education has encouraged each autonomous higher education sector and institution to have its own strategic planning process.

Between December, 1988, and August, 1989, the Coordinating Commission heard reports on the strategic planning process and key strategies of the various sectors. The Coordinating Commission heard from representatives of the independent colleges, the private career schools, the state colleges, the University of Nebraska system and the technical community colleges.

The sectors have identified several strategies which impact institutional viability. By no means are specific strategies or priorities identical from sector to sector or even identical for all institutions within a sector. Nonetheless, there are some general strategies which have received considerable attention within Nebraska sectors of higher education.

This report briefly summarizes 14 general strategies, each of which has been identified to the Coordinating Commission by one or more sectors of higher education. A final section of this report describes the strategic planning process for higher education from the perspective of state government.

The Coordinating Commission is indebted to presentations and reports from: Dr. John W. White, Jr., President, Nebraska Wesleyan University; Tim Darnauer, Director, Travel Careers Institute; Dr. Donald J. Mash, President, Wayne State College; Dr. Donal J. Burns, Associate Executive Vice President/Provost, University of Nebraska; and Dr. Joseph W. Preusser, President, Central Community College.

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1. Recruit and retain the targeted number and types of students.

The number and type of students an institution recruits and retains shapes the character and expectations of that institution.

Student bodies differ greatly from institution to institution, even within the same sector. Common differences between student bodies include total numbers, geographic background, average class age, average tuition paid and career expectations, to name a few.

It is common for each institution to periodically review how it defines its enrollment targets, admission criteria, recruitment activities and deadlines for admission applications. Nebraska's public institutions have relatively "open" admission policies.

Some institutions lean toward growth by admitting increasing numbers of students, while others attempt to maintain a targeted balance of students, physical facilities and support services.

For some students, competition between institutions is keen. On the other hand, many institutions offer the only practical option for the more place-bound students in their service areas.

Increasingly, institutions seek ways to recruit non-traditional students, often through cooperative arrangements. In addition, some institutions are focusing increased attention on recruiting and retention of minority students. Also, most sectors support continued improvements in the process of transferring credits when students transfer between institutions.

As a consequence of differing admission and retention standards, the percentage of students retained, especially freshman, varies noticeably between institutions.

2. Recruit and retain faculty members needed to keep programs competitive.

Competition for faculty members is expected to heat up further, in part due to predicted shortages in many disciplines nationally.

Competitive pay is the most frequently cited tactic in the recruitment battles for faculty .

To gain flexibility in staffing and in recruitment of new faculty, the university campuses have instituted a tenure buy-out plan. Other institutions are developing similar plans.

In addition, many institutions attract faculty by providing opportunities for them to consult, research, write and create things within their specialty. Also, academic institutions carefully cultivate an environment of academic freedom as well as participation by faculty in the academic governance process.

3. Improve the general education and skill levels of students.

Many institutions are focusing attention on redefining general education and skill needs of students in today's more technical and more global economy. In many cases, the institutions are changing course requirements and modifying course curriculum to build competencies in communications, mathematics, research methods, problem-solving and understanding different cultures and languages.

At the same time institutions are faced with the reality of students with widely different abilities in areas such as literacy, math and science. Institutions have developed differing tactics to deal with students with remedial education needs.

In addition, the technical community colleges are furnishing adult basic education programs to people with widely varied educational needs and expectations.

4. Give students skills and knowledge necessary to meet needs of employers.

Giving students competitive advantages to get jobs and succeed at them remains a key driving strategy, especially at schools teaching technical and vocational subjects.

Many of the degree programs are designed in large measure to meet employer needs. In addition, the technical community colleges and the private career schools offer a variety of non-degree occupational courses designed to meet employment realities in the marketplace. Some of these non-degree courses are taught under training contracts with a business or a development agency. Also many institutions offer continuing education to adults for long-term career development.

The institutions use a variety of approaches to stay in touch with the various needs of employers. Methods commonly used to review programs and identify unmet needs include: surveys of employers, accreditation reviews, advisory committees, independent consultants, as well as internal councils. Also, institutions regularly review trends in the numbers of students enrolled in courses and the number of students completing programs or getting degrees with various majors.

5. Reach more place-bound students by delivering programs to off-campus locations including expanded use of telecommunications technology.

Most of the sectors expect an increased role in off-campus delivery of educational programs, often in cooperation with other institutions. Especially in the public sectors, they see this expanded off-campus role as a legitimate response to calls for increased access to higher education programs. The philosophy of some institutions holds that virtually all individuals deserve reasonable opportunities for education throughout their life.

The targeted population for off-campus programs often includes a high proportion of non-traditional students. These students are seeking relevant programs for continuing education, recertification, bachelor degrees and master degrees.

Off-campus delivery of programs can involve conventional classes, classes in a business location or some use of telecommunications technology. Cooperation often includes shared use of facilities and faculty.

6. Better meet the growing demand for advanced degrees.

In general, as society gets more complex, educational requirements rise. For example, a master degree has become a prerequisite for an increasing number of jobs.

The public University of Nebraska and the state colleges, as well as private Creighton University, see key roles for their institutions in meeting the demand for advanced degrees, including the calls by place-bound students for better access to advanced degrees.

Especially for some of the state colleges, a change in Role and Mission statutes or a change in funding practices may be necessary in order to achieve their goals. Some of the state colleges seek authority to confer master degrees in arts, science and fine arts. Some of the state colleges want to use state funds to offer programs leading to MBA degrees which they are authorized to give.

Almost all of the sectors profess a desire to avoid unnecessary and unproductive duplication in graduate programs by cooperating where feasible, including cooperation between public and private sectors.

7. Expand the scope of research efforts and in some cases improve graduate programs in related areas.

The university system has targeted several areas for expanded research initiatives. These expanded initiatives include: biotechnology, water sciences, engineering, material sciences, telecommunications and computer sciences. Research programs at universities often are closely tied to graduate programs which provide education for future scientists, engineers and professionals.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln continues as the major comprehensive research institution with the University of Nebraska Medical Center active in health-related fields.

Expert evaluators from both inside and outside the university system help identify areas for expanded research initiatives. In addition, the university system has established collaborative efforts with business and industry in several research areas.

The state colleges see a role for themselves in applied research related to instruction as well as to economic and community development in their service areas.

8. Make adjustments in support services and facilities needed by various segments of an increasingly diverse student population.

There are profound differences in how various institutions attempt to provide support services such as academic assistance, housing options, computer resources, recreation activities, social events, cultural experiences and employment placement.

Some institutions project genuine concern for the overall development of students, while other institutions define their role much more narrowly.

Decisions about support services as well as about enrollment growth and program needs help shape the facility planning of each institution. In response to these matters, many institutions maintain detailed multi-year road maps for planned facility improvements.

When offering off-campus programs, virtually all of the institutions use the facilities and support services of another institution or a business on a cooperative basis.

9. Improve libraries and integrate library information systems.

Most institutions see a need to improve library resources in order to remain competitive and to serve students and faculty better.

Integration of library information system focuses on cooperation with the mutual benefit of more easily sharing library resources between institutions.

PUBLIC IMAGE

10. Improve some aspect of the public's perception of institution and sector.

Many of the sectors complain they are not sufficiently well-known, understood or appreciated. In addition, some of the sectors say the public's perception of them doesn't square with reality.

For example, the state colleges say that too often the public still thinks of them as teachers colleges when in fact their role has become much more diverse, including sizeable degree programs in business and health-related fields.

To help shape public perceptions, most institutions commonly use the techniques of modern marketing, including market research, advertising, press releases and public relations. Some even consider changes in the name of their institution.

11. Assist development efforts of communities and businesses.

Many institutions have shown increasing willingness to assist in the process of economic development for community growth. Most institutions attempt to assist responsible economic expansion by ensuring that employers and employees have access to both general and specialized educational programs appropriate to the institution's mission.

Some institutions showcase their research efforts as economic development assistance. The University of Nebraska considers economic development a major part of its research mission.

In addition, many institutions provide technical assistance as requested by businesses and communities in a wide variety of areas.

STUDENT FINANCIAL AID

12. Be able to offer sufficient financial aid to enable students of various financial means to get needed education.

Student financial aid in its many forms continues as a key part of financing higher education, especially in light of ever-increasing tuition rates.

The federal government plays a significant role in providing financial aid, primarily through loans and grants. Other sources of financial aid include state financial aid, tuition remission by institutions and scholarships from a wide variety of foundations, endowments and organizations.

The independent colleges and private career schools maintain that the state's goals would be better met if state financial aid to needy students would be more comparable to state financial aid provided in other states.

In response to calls for more assistance to minority students, the Legislature established an endowment fund with a combination of public and private funds for the support of minority scholarships at University of Nebraska campuses.

13. Attract sufficient funding from public to meet the needs and increase the benefits of higher education.

Competition for funding from the public remains a reality.

State appropriations provide a sizeable source of financing for higher education, especially for the public institutions. The public sector institutions highlight the need for additional state general fund support of the various programs of their institutions.

In addition to state funding, the technical community colleges levy a local property tax within each region. One of them--Western--has bumped against its property tax ceiling and others are nearing their ceiling.

While students in all sectors benefit from state financial aid to students, the call for additional student aid from state funds usually is led by the independent colleges.

The public sector institutions along with the independent colleges also compete for voluntary support from corporations, foundations, alumni and other individual donors.

14. Be alert to ramifications of changes in governing structure.

Institutions are well aware that changes in governance structure can impact them, perhaps in ways not easily foreseen.

The state legislature recently enacted legislation to transfer Kearney State College from the state college system into the University of Nebraska system and rename it the University of Nebraska at Kearney. This legislation also called for a study of public postsecondary institutions with particular attention to their governing structures.

The technical community colleges often cite local control as a key fixture in their ability to stay responsive to community and regional needs.

Beyond the formal governance structure, some institutions are seeking increased community participation in the processes of evaluation and goal setting. They commonly use surveys, advisory and study committees as well as encouraging exchange of ideas between the public and their administrators and board members.

State Government's Perspective: The Basic State Functions

Strategic planning from the perspective of state government is different than from the institutions' perspective. State governments tend to focus on basic state functions in higher education, which typically include:

*Providing a governance system for public institutions of higher education.

*Budgeting and allocation of public funds for higher education programs.

*Assigning roles and missions to public sectors and institutions and setting goals to meet higher education needs.

*Providing for coordination and review of current and potentially needed higher education programs.

Not surprisingly, most of these concerns are reflected in the goals for a state government-sponsored study of higher education in Nebraska.

LB 247 enacted May, 1989, requires a two-phase study of public postsecondary education in Nebraska, as follows:

"Phase I of the study shall address and make recommendations on governance and structure issues and those issues for which a constitutional amendment may be needed...including...the proposed transfer of Kearney State College to the University of Nebraska, including any needed realignment of the remaining state colleges and any needed revisions in the role and mission of the university and the

state colleges impacted by such transfer; (and) changes, if any, needed in the governing structure of public postsecondary education institutions.

"Phase II of the study shall address...

"(a) A specific review of role and mission statutes for each postsecondary institution, with particular attention to the appropriate role of Kearney State College or its successor institution in the context of the assignment of graduate program responsibilities for all postsecondary education in the state;

"(b) Coordination of programs and facilities among the institutions and sectors of postsecondary education, with particular attention to telecommunications and economic development programs and the appropriate role of the Nebraska Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education;

"(c) A strategic plan for the future of public postsecondary education in the state and the identification of an on-going process for the development and implementation of such a plan."